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THE NATURE OF PERSONALITY¹

The problem with which this book deals is the issue between naturalism and idealism. Is the ultimate nature of reality material or spiritual? Is the world-process mechanical only, or is it mechanism in the service of rational and moral purpose? The author finds that to both of these world-views the realization of individualized personal life presents the final problem of existence. The ultimate meaning of the world is to be found in the meaning of personal life. The task to which he addresses himself is the examination of the meaning and the implications of personality, with the view of determining the ultimate nature of reality. This investigation is to be carried on upon the basis of the general scientific postulates and according to the strictly scientific method. Personality is an objective fact of the world of nature, along with other facts, and as such it must be studied. The method of procedure adopted is to trace, from the earliest point accessible to us, the life-history of personality, asking at each stage in the process what evidence the facts bring forth as to the character of the ultimate ground of reality.

Dr. Smyth finds that inorganic evolution is dominated by a "tendency" which results in the preparation of an environment adapted to the advent of life. Granting that the phenomena of living matter can be reduced to physico-chemical quantities and motions, and so to mathematical manipulation, there is still required some principle which will account for the progressively higher forms of life which appear in this mechanical process. Biologists have not been able to agree as to what that principle may be. In the higher stages of life we have the development of a highly organized nervous system made ready for the use of the human mind. Here again there is an anticipation of future utility which suggests the presence of something other than mechanism, some non-physical form of energy which directs the mechanical process. When we pass to the examination of personal experience, we unquestionably find ourselves before activities which cannot be accounted for through the operation of physical forces alone. The activities involved in feeling, thinking, and willing manifest the presence of an energy that is distinctly psychic. There are given in experience two factors, the physical and the psychical, and these are irreducible one to the other. The unity of the personal life can only be understood by assuming an interaction between these two factors. Experience then reveals an order

¹ *The Meaning of Personal Life*. By Newman Smyth. New York: Scribner, 1916. ix+363 pages. \$2.00.

of interacting energies, brought into a unity in the personal life. It is peculiar to personality that it asserts its own worth to itself, and values other things as they serve its desires and aims. In virtue of this elective activity, man arranges his own environment, builds his own world, scientific, social, and moral. In all of this there is manifested not only an "increase of psychical energy," a "creative synthesis," but also a different kind of ability from that manifested in the world without: the power to produce qualitative values and to measure their worth in relation to our aims and desires.

The personal selection of values for life is another law than that of natural selection of forms fitted to survive. This selective activity of personal life now guides the natural selection, but does not supplant it; both work together in the unity of experience. Now, since man is the interpretation of the world, the ultimate reality must also comprehend both these principles; and since the unity of personality guarantees the unity of the world, this dualism of man and nature is not ultimate; underneath all, manifesting itself in nature and in man, is the absolute spiritual Being of idealism. Such is the general argument of the book. The author believes that personality came to its fullest expression in Jesus, and he devotes much space in working out the implications of what he finds there. There is also a chapter devoted to a consideration of the arguments that may be adduced in favor of a belief in immortality.

The author has undertaken an extremely comprehensive task. The carrying out of his purpose involves a survey of the whole field of scientific knowledge, and requires a decisive answer to many problems concerning which scientists themselves are not agreed. But aside from the difficulties arising out of the unsolved scientific problems, objection may be taken to the fundamental assumption upon which his metaphysical interpretation rests. Have we a right to assume that the consciousness of man reveals the nature of ultimate reality? Just because man has this "selective activity" and exercises a "creative synthesis," the world which he builds for himself includes only a part of reality, and this evaluated by the way in which it satisfies his desires. What guarantees that this anthropocentric world truly represents the whole? This raises the question as to whether religion may not have to content itself with a less ambitious apologetic, grounding its truth-claim in a way analogous to that of science.

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